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Continuing education programs are criticized for their lack of creative program planning, inadequate staffing, insufficient funding, and weak professional organizations. It is suggested that graduate programs in continuing education need to appeal to and develop professionals who are applied social scientists, have a working knowledge of educational tools, and have extensive experience with adults, in order to upgrade faculty for development of creative programs. Funds need to be sought to finance research on community educational needs, scholarships, and educational expansion and replacement. Strengthening and unifying professional organizations can provide an effective tool for solving such problems. Continuing higher education has good administrators, budget management, and organization of professional literature, from which to draw strength for necessary improvements. (pt)

R. De Crow

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"From the Dean's Desk"

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Some Unfinished Business in Continuing Education



SOME UNFINISHED BUSINESS IN CONTINUING EDUCATION

The Dean's Desk publications give A.U.E.C. Deans a chance to discuss with their colleagues the gnawing thoughts which plague their daily work. The purpose, I take it, is not to produce public relations documents which will make us comfortable and complacent, but to raise issues and, hopefully, colloquies about issues on which others may have differing opinions. If my colleagues disagree with some or all of the comments I make, I hope they will react in future issues of this series.

I would like to discuss, briefly, some of the unfinished business of continuing higher education as I see it. These are the problems which must be solved if continuing education is to reach its full maturity as an important arm of higher education.

Creative Programming Lacking

Despite the fact that we've been at the business of continuing education seriously for a quarter of a century in higher education there is still too little real experimentation in our program development. Too infrequently do we depart from the standard lecture--discussion format. Too little use is made of simulation devices from role playing to scenario development. Too seldom do we vary formats to sustain learner interest. It isn't often that we use formats in tandem--linking residential experiences with spaced learning. Not enough use is made of video taping or other instructional tools. But it isn't only in program formats where we fail.

We also fail to think hard enough about how to interest and involve people in programs in which they are potentially interested. We take the easy path. We rely too much on responding to requests from our publics and spend too little time in creating response in our publics. Part of the answer is in making our programming contemporaneous. This does not mean that we must deal exclusively with the present, but it does mean that we must merchandise our programming so that our publics clearly see its relevance. The Peloponnesian Wars are clearly germane to our situation in Viet Nam today. But don't expect to turn out an audience in a course labeled "History of the Peloponnesian Wars," although they might respond enthusiastically to "Viet Nam: An Historical Perspective" in which they read, among other things, this history.

We also fail in creative programming because many of us have not had a solid liberal arts background which can provide the value system and perspective to discern the key intellectual ideas which need to be taught to our adult clientele. We cannot be renaissance men, but to do creative programming we must be able to recognize what is important in academic disciplinary knowledge from what is merely esoteric. We must also be able to detect which faculty members have this kind of discernment and the desire to impart their knowledge in an interesting and provocative way to adults. We don't need programmers who schedule courses for faculty who merely teach classes.

Important intellectual ideas + committed and talented faculty + imaginatively involved clientele + appropriate methodology and format = creative programming. But we have too little of it.

Staffing is Inadequate

This leads me quickly to my related second concern. Not only do we need staff members with a broad liberal education base, but also staff possessing a higher order of professional skills. Unfortunately our graduate programs in Continuing Education are not turning out the kind of staff members we really need.

We need professionals who are essentially applied social scientists, who thoroughly understand the sociology, economics, psychology and politics of the communities they serve and the institutions (colleges and universities) for which they work. They should also, of course, have some working knowledge of educational tools--evaluation, curricular development and learning theory. But in addition to this background they should have had extensive experience in working with real adults in real communities and with real faculties in actual programming--the necessary experience of having succeeded and failed in utilizing their professional skills under guidance. Some would call this an internship, although I wish there were a term which connoted total immersion, which is what I really mean.

If we candidly look at ourselves and our staff members we must admit that there are too few of us who have these qualifications and that our graduate programs training our successors are not recruiting enough people into our work with these potentialities, nor are they really providing this kind of graduate preparation for them. We must entice a higher caliber person into continuing education and train them properly, for without better professionals on our staff, we'll not get creative programs. Nor will we get programmers who can accurately

assess the educational needs of the community, who can work with its power structure and its disenfranchised, its clientele delivery systems, its hopes, its aspirations, its frustrations and its problems. We'll not get programmers who know intimately about the workings of the university, its politics, its raison d'etre, its reward systems, its resources. And most importantly we'll not get programmers who can orchestrate the meshing of the two. For much of our job is this kind of creative brokerage.

Funding is Insufficient

We have not as yet solved the funding problems of continuing education. I do not object to the fact that continuing education must be largely self-supporting, but I do object to the exploitation of the resources we help to generate. How many continuing education divisions have adequate funds in their budgets for research on community educational needs, for venture capital in program development? How many have even minimally adequate scholarship or loan funds for deserving but needy adults? How many of us aggressively seek outside funds from foundations or from state or federal agencies? How many are permitted to seek grants and gifts for capital expenses from private donors or facilities grants from government sources? How many are even allowed to accumulate reserve funds for plant expansion or replacement? Until we solve some of these resource allocation problems within the university and attack the resource allocation problems for continuing education outside the university, we will be unable to reach our full potential. How many of us have tried?

And how many of us practicing pragmatists, with one eye on the cash register and one eye on the enrollment report, have had the courage to look potential funding in the eye--private, state, or federal, and say this program is not consistent with the resources or purposes of my institution and turn it down. We've got some unfinished business all right!

Moribund Professional Organizations

One of the ways most professions attack these problems is through strong unified professional organizations. Can we afford to have A.U.E.C., N.U.E.A. and the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy of the National Land-Grant Colleges all speaking in feeble, garbled, discordant, and often ineffective ways for continuing higher education policy, legislation or funding? Can we afford three weak organizations each lacking an effective secretariat and central office, each organizing inadequate professional meetings nationally and regionally? I think not. It's time we get our professional house in order if we are to begin to solve some of our more pressing problems. Some of you have heard more from me than you wish to on this subject so I'll not explore it further.

A Final Note

Lest you think I'm an eternally crotchety pessimist, let me end on a positive note. There are some things we do well. We are reasonably good administrators--at least compared to most university types. We manage budgets rather well, we can organize, we're reasonably efficient and run fairly taut ships. Most of us know how to promote middle class audiences passably--the mass media aren't a mystery to us--though we know very little about how to deliver working class and upper class audiences.

We've made real strides in getting our professional literature in order through the ERIC Clearinghouse and one can even discern a modest improvement in its quality.

We handle public relations as well as the next guy and some of us are passable politicians. Not too many of us are pedantic or pretentious and we have an awful lot of energy and optimism.

These are hardly qualities that trigger off a rhapsody, but they are real accomplishments we can build on. But as I've said, we've got some unfinished business. Marianne Moore was talking about poetry when she said it, but it applies equally well to continuing higher education, so I'll sum up with her words "Not until we have a garden with real toads in it will we have it."

